

Tennessee Department of Transportation 15 Project Case Study

Project Assessment Final Report Walnut Grove Relocation Project in Memphis

Prepared for the Commissioner
Tennessee Department of Transportation

by

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1. Introduction

Background

This report presents the findings and recommendations resulting from an independent assessment of the proposed Walnut Grove Relocation project in Memphis. This assessment was conducted by The University of Tennessee Center for Transportation Research at the special request of Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) Commissioner Gerald Nicely. This assessment was part of a Case Study of 15 proposed or pending highway projects located across the state. In requesting the Case Study, Commissioner Nicely and TDOT leaders acknowledged the changing nature of transportation project planning and management in the state, and also the Department's goal to enhance some of its planning and business practices in response to these changes.

As noted in the Proposal/Statement of Work document for the 15 Project Case Study, the planning, design and construction of major highway projects are accomplished in a long-term and comprehensive process in Tennessee and elsewhere. Typically, a major highway project undertaken by TDOT will require eight to 10 years from the initial planning phase through the final construction. At the beginning of project development, critical decisions are made that set the direction and scope for the project. In the past, when Tennessee's population was not booming, industries had not yet realized the strategic location of the state, personal technology was for the select few, and government was held in high esteem, decisions made early in project development tended to hold true throughout the process.

The decision process for highway projects must be approached in a different fashion in today's world. Citizens want a bottom-line look at what government is producing and why. They want to understand government's decision-making process and be invited to participate. The growth and diversification of Tennessee's population has also resulted in new and greater needs. The state's rural areas and cities are facing mobility and quality of life issues that require a range of transportation solutions and frequent public involvement in the decision-making process.

In today's fast-moving environment, community growth patterns are shifting, citizens' expectations are changing and residents' transportation needs are diverse. TDOT's highway projects, however, still require years to complete. The Department realizes that to keep pace with the 21st century society, TDOT needs to change and update some of its planning and business practices. The Case Study described and documented herein is intended as an initial step for TDOT in this change process. Through the review of the 15 major highway projects, including the Walnut Grove Relocation project, the Case Study will provide critical input for TDOT to begin to identify areas for improvement and ways to better serve Tennessee's citizens.

Report Overview

This Project Assessment Final Report summarizes the work performed to evaluate the Walnut Grove Relocation project, as well as the results and conclusions of this work. Following the Introduction, Section 2 of the report summarizes the objectives of the Case Study and presents a description of the study scope and methodology used to evaluate the Walnut Grove Relocation project, as well as the other 14 projects included in the Case Study. Next, there is a general description and discussion of the information gathering activities which were undertaken specifically for Walnut Grove Relocation project (Section 3), followed by a summary of project information resulting from these data collection activities (Section 4). The project information summary includes a project description, a history of the project and project planning activities undertaken to date, and the current status of the project.

The remaining sections of the report present the findings and conclusions reached by the evaluation team. Section 5 documents the key “process-related” issues and concerns for the project that were reported to and/or identified by the evaluation team. Section 6 presents the team’s assessment conclusions, and Section 7 presents the team’s recommendations for needed actions by TDOT and/or others.

It should be noted that this is the only report and the Final Report for the subject project that was generated by the Case Study effort. In keeping with the objectives of the Case Study and the utility of this document, this report is concise and direct to the point. It should also be noted that this report does not address legal requirements or obligations of TDOT or any other entity, and should not be construed to do so. Rather, it is the intent of this report to identify remaining project issues and suggest improved practices, both to be considered by the Department.

2. Case Study Description

Study Objectives

As noted previously, a primary objective of the 15 Project Case Study was to provide input for TDOT to identify areas for improvement of its highway project planning and business practices so that the Department can better serve Tennessee's citizens. This objective was effectively addressed by identifying problem areas that were common to at least some or many of the projects evaluated, and suggesting corrective actions to be considered. (These "over-arching" areas for improvement are identified and discussed in a separate report that is being prepared for submission in the latter part of August.)

With specific regard to the Walnut Grove Relocation project and the other selected projects, the Case Study was also intended to provide TDOT with impartial recommendations on whether the selected highway projects should continue as presently scheduled or whether additional action(s) should be undertaken. This objective of the Case Study, as it relates to the Walnut Grove Relocation project, is addressed in this Project Assessment Final Report.

Study Scope

It is important to note that the Walnut Grove Relocation project was one of 15 major highway projects selected for inclusion in the Case Study, and that each of the projects received the same level, detail and type of assessment. The projects selected for the Case Study are enumerated below, including the Walnut Grove Relocation project:

1. State Route 840 South
2. Wolf River Parkway in Memphis
3. State Route 451 – Cookeville area
4. US 127S – Crossville
5. US 64 – Polk and Bradley Counties
6. State Route 475 - Knoxville Beltway (orange route)
7. James White Parkway Extension – Knoxville
8. Pellissippi Parkway Extension – Knoxville
9. US 321 (State Route 35) – Greenville
10. State Route 840 North
- 11. Walnut Grove Relocation Project in Memphis**
12. Jackson Bypass
13. US 127N – Crossville
14. US 321 – between Gatlinburg and Cosby
15. State Route 357 Extension – Blountville

As defined in the Proposal/Statement of Work document, the Case Study had a focused scope, which directed the evaluation team to address the following areas of concern for each of the 15 projects (expressed as questions to be answered):

- What were the reasons for starting the project and should the reasons be reevaluated?
- What are the economic, environmental and social effects of the project?
- What is the project's relationship to the local and/or regional comprehensive plans and if appropriate the plans of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)?
- What was the extent of public involvement in the project development, and was it appropriate for the decision-making process?
- Should the department consider additional actions before continuing with the project as currently scheduled?

The Case Study had a restricted budget and an aggressive time schedule of four months for completion. It was not the intent of the Case Study, or individual project assessments, to re-do the planning and decision-making for any one or all of the included projects. Rather, it was the goal of the Case Study and individual project assessments to evaluate the overall planning and decision-making "process(es)" undertaken to date, and to determine if deficiencies or omissions existed in these "process(es)."

Based on these "process" assessments, the two objectives of the Case Study were accomplished. That is: (1) to provide TDOT with impartial recommendations on whether selected highway projects should continue as presently scheduled or whether additional action(s) should be undertaken; and (2) to provide input for TDOT to identify areas for improvement of its highway project planning and business practices. Finally, it should also be emphasized that it was **not** the intent of the Case Studies to recommend to TDOT specific actions to take regarding any of the selected projects, but rather to identify areas that need some action by the Department and/or others.

Study Methodology Overview

An evaluation team comprised of eight distinguished faculty and staff from The University of Tennessee was assembled to assess and develop conclusions and recommendations on the 15 projects under review. The members of this evaluation team are identified below. Resumes for each of these individuals are contained in the Proposal/Statement of Work document for the Case Study, available from The University of Tennessee Center for Transportation Research. The team members were:

- Dr. Stephen Richards, Team Leader
- Dr. David Middendorf
- Dr. Gregory Reed
- Dr. Tom Urbanik
- Dr. Mary English
- Dr. Arun Chatterjee
- Dr. Fred Wegmann
- Dr. John Tidwell

All of the team members have extensive experience in the transportation field, and collectively they brought diverse backgrounds and balance to the assessment process in the key areas of: transportation and land use planning, highway location and design, environmental assessment, and transportation/traffic impact assessment.

Figure 1 presents a summary of the activities (work tasks) that were undertaken to complete the Case Study. A detailed description of each of these activities is contained in the Proposal/Statement of Work document. It is significant to note at this point that a tremendous effort was made to gather any and all pertinent project-related information that could be useful to the evaluation team. Also, public listening sessions were held for each project, and members of the evaluation team met with and/or interviewed countless interest groups, officials, and concerned individuals to gather input and identify areas of concerns. It should be emphasized that the information gathering activities focused on the intended “process” assessment.

Section 3 of this report presents additional detail on the information and input gathered specifically for the Walnut Grove Relocation project. All of the information received and gathered for the project is being retained on-site at The University of Tennessee Center for Transportation Research, and is available for inspection and duplication by appointment or advance notice. In addition, as a disclaimer, Section 3 does not attempt to itemize every individual document, e-mail, phone call, meeting, etc. that was reviewed by team members; however, all such records are available for inspection.

After extensive review, discussion and assessment of each of the projects under study, the evaluation team reached consensus concerning answers to the questions posed in the Proposal/Statement of Work document (see Study Scope of this report). The evaluation team ultimately chose to present its conclusions by indicating whether the project planning and decision-making processes were **satisfactory or unsatisfactory** with regard to the following issue areas:

- Project need adequately established?
- Planning process appropriate for need?
- Alternatives appropriate?
- Design process appropriate for need?
- Local planning involvement?
- Public involvement appropriate for decision-making?
- Adequate environmental, economic and social assessment?

The conclusions reached by the evaluation team regarding the above issue areas were used by the team as a basis for recommendations on needed actions. Sections 6 and 7 of this report present the evaluation team assessments and recommendations, respectively.

Figure 1. Summary of Case Study Activities

Task 1 – Gather Comprehensive Background Information

Task 1.1 – Solicit/Receive Pertinent Project Documents and Related Materials

Task 1.2 – Interview State and Local Officials

Task 1.3 – Review Pertinent Planning and Research Documents

Task 2 – Finalize Case Study Methodology

Task 2.1 – Determine Project Issues

Task 2.2 – Refine Project Assessment Criteria and Procedures

Task 3 – Provide Information Clearinghouse

Task 3.1 – Establish Case Study Point-of-Contact

Task 3.2 - Prepare/Distribute Daily Project Updates

Task 3.3 – Provide Media and Public Information (as appropriate)

Task 4 – Solicit Interest Group and Public Input

Task 4.1 – Solicit/Receive Pertinent Project Issue-Related Materials

Task 4.2 - Conduct Public Input Sessions

Task 4.3 – Attend Interest Group Briefings

Task 5 – Conduct In-depth Project (Issues) Reviews

Task 5.1 – Establish Work Teams

Task 5.2 – Compile and Analyze Project Information/Input

Task 5.3 – Refine/Clarify Project Issues

Task 5.4 – Develop Draft Project Critiques

Task 6 – Conduct/Complete Project (Issues) Evaluations

Task 6.1 – Establish Senior Review Team

Task 6.2 – Review/Finalize Project Critiques

Task 6.3 – Develop/Document Findings and Recommendations

Task 7 – Document Case Study Findings

Task 7.1 – Prepare/Submit Project Reports

Task 7.2 – Prepare/Submit Case Study Overview Report

3. Information/Input Reviewed

Documents and Correspondence

The review of the Walnut Grove Road relocation project was based in part on an examination of existing documents and other materials pertaining to the project. These documents and materials included an Advance Planning Report (APR), an environmental impact analysis report, an analysis of traffic in the Shelby Farms area, the long-range transportation plan for the Memphis urban area, and various other documents. These materials were obtained from or submitted by the Tennessee Department of Transportation; the Memphis and Shelby County Department of Regional Services, Division of Planning and Development; and the Friends of Shelby Farms.

Another important source of information was correspondence received from concerned citizens and elected officials. A total of 14 individual pieces of correspondence, including letters and e-mail messages, were received. This correspondence provided valuable information and insight into the various issues surrounding the Walnut Grove Road relocation project.

Meetings

Members of the evaluation met with individuals representing various groups and agencies with an interest in the Walnut Grove Road relocation project, often at the request of these groups or agencies. These meetings were held for various purposes. They provided an opportunity to exchange information, identify or clarify issues concerning the Walnut Grove Road relocation project, and determine the existence and availability of other documents and materials that might assist the evaluation team in reviewing the project.

Meetings were held with Mr. Carter Gray, Administrator, Division of Planning and Development, Memphis and Shelby County Department of Regional Services; Mr. Wain Gaskins, City Engineer and City of Memphis Engineering Department.

Public Listening Session

A Public Listening Session was conducted to give individual citizens, elected officials, property owners, and organized groups affected by or interested in the Walnut Grove Road relocation project an opportunity to share their ideas, opinions, and concerns regarding the project as well as provide information to the evaluation team on the relevant issues. The session was held at the Shelby Farms Agri-Center in Memphis, Tennessee, on Thursday, June 12, 2003. Approximately 128 people attended the session, including the President of the Friends of Shelby Farms, and 27 of the attendees spoke at the microphone. Only three people attending the session submitted comments on the “comment cards” that were distributed at the registration desk. A number of attendees,

however, provided written statements and various other documents and written materials for the evaluation team to review.

4. Project Information Summary

Project Description

This project involves the relocation of Walnut Grove Road between Humphreys Boulevard and Germantown Road in Memphis, Tennessee, as well as the extension and reconstruction of two other roadways in the area. Between Humphreys Boulevard and Germantown Road, Walnut Grove Road currently runs east-west through the middle of Shelby Farms, a 4,500-acre former county penal farm property that now provides for a wide variety of governmental and recreational uses. The proposed project would begin just east of the Wolf River Bridge on the west side of Shelby Farms where it would tie into the planned reconstruction of the intersection of Walnut Grove Road and Humphreys Boulevard into a single-point urban interchange. Walnut Grove Road would be relocated from its present straight alignment to follow the western and northern edges of Shelby Farms. The project would end at a new interchange with Germantown Road north of the present interchange. The project would result in the physical removal of the existing Walnut Grove Road through the middle of Shelby Farms as well as Farm Road. The length of the project is approximately 4.3 miles.

The relocated Walnut Grove Road would consist of three 12-ft traffic lanes in each direction separated by a 72-ft depressed median, allowing for the addition of a fourth lane in each direction on the inside of the roadway. The cross-section would also have an auxiliary 12-ft lane in each direction to connect ramp movements as well as 12-ft shoulders on the inside and outside lanes. The minimum right-of-way width is 250 ft. The new facility would have a design speed of 60 mph and be functionally classified as an urban major arterial. Access would be restricted to grade-separated interchanges at Humphreys Boulevard, Sycamore View Road, Kirby-Whitten Road, Appling Road, and Germantown Road.

As mentioned, the project also involves the extension and reconstruction of two other roads in the area. Sycamore View Road would be extended a distance of 1.6 miles to a single-point urban interchange with the relocated Walnut Grove Road on the west side of Shelby Farms. The proposed cross-section would consist of three 12-ft traffic lanes in each direction separated by a median, 8-ft paved shoulders, curbs and gutters, and a 5-ft sidewalk on each side, all within a 114-ft right-of-way. The extension of Sycamore View Road would result in the elimination of Farm Road through Shelby Farms.

The other ancillary project involves the reconstruction of 0.84 miles of Raleigh-Lagrange Road. The proposed 108-ft right-of-way would accommodate three 12-ft traffic lanes in each direction, 6-ft paved shoulders, curbs and gutters, and sidewalks.

Project History

The Walnut Grove Road relocation project is also known as Alternative F, because it represents the latest in a series of alternative alignments that have been studied for the proposed Kirby Parkway through Shelby Farms. Early plans called for three major north-south arterials that would traverse Shelby Farms. The Sweetbriar – Sycamore View connection was the first to be dropped from highway plans. This was followed by the elimination of the proposed Appling – Riverdale connection. When the Kirby – Whitten connection was dropped, a major redesign of the road network in the area was required.

The 1969 Memphis Urban Area Transportation Study (MUATS) included a Kirby Parkway corridor to serve north-south travel demands in eastern Shelby County. Kirby Parkway was part of the Crumpler-Kirby-Whitten-Dutwiler-Sledge-Armour corridor, designed to serve as a principal facility for high volume traffic flow. The 1973 East Memphis Transportation Plan update recommended Kirby Road-Kirby Parkway-Whitten Road as a continuous north-south arterial. The 1976 update of the Memphis Urban Area Transportation Plan also included Kirby Parkway as a major road. Beginning in August 1981, parts of the Kirby Parkway began to appear in the Memphis Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). As the MPO has updated and amended the Major Road Plan over the years, numerous changes have been made in the right-of-way and cross-section of segments of the Kirby Parkway. For example, in November 1984, an interchange between Kirby Parkway and Walnut Grove Road was added to the Major Road Plan. An Advance Planning Report (APR) for the Kirby Parkway was completed on December 8, 1983. The report, however, was not consistent with the Major Road Plan in effect at the time.

TDOT initiated the scoping processes for the Kirby Parkway project on February 1, 1984. By July 1986, the environmental assessment and preliminary design were underway. On December 19, 1988, TDOT conducted a public hearing regarding the improvements to the Kirby Parkway project. TDOT began preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Kirby Parkway between Split Oak Road and Stage Road, including the extension of Sycamore View Road from Mullins Station Road to Kirby Parkway. The Final EIS (FEIS) for the Kirby Parkway project was approved in August 1991.

Between 1991 and 1999, the section of Kirby Parkway between Macon Road south of I-40 and Stage Road north of I-40 has been constructed and opened to traffic. This section, however, lies north of Shelby Farms.

The 1991 FEIS recommended a preferred alignment for the Kirby Parkway through Shelby Farms. It involved widening Walnut Grove Road from the Humphreys Boulevard intersection to a new interchange west of the existing intersection of Farm

Road and Walnut Grove Road. The resulting cross-section would consist of three 12-ft traffic lanes in each direction, curbs and gutters, and a raised median within a 114-ft right-of-way. From the new interchange, the Kirby Parkway would be built north across Shelby Farms on new right-of-way to the intersection of Mullins Station Road and Whitten Road. The new roadway's cross-section would also consist of three 12-ft traffic lanes in each direction, curbs and gutters, and a raised median within a 114-ft right-of-way. The FEIS also recommended extending Sycamore View Road from State Road to the new Kirby Parkway within Shelby Farms.

In December 1993, TDOT amended its contract with the City of Memphis concerning the Kirby Parkway project. Removed from the amended contract were the section of Kirby Parkway between Macon Road and Walnut Grove Road, the extension of Sycamore View Road, and the widening of Walnut Grove Road between I-240 and Kirby-Whitten. On November 2, 1994, the Memphis MPO approved the Major Road Plan Update in which the section of Kirby Parkway between Walnut Grove Road and Humphreys Boulevard was deleted.

On November 17, 1994, TDOT conducted a public hearing on preliminary design plans for the section of Kirby Parkway from Humphreys Boulevard south of Shelby Farms to Macon Road north of Shelby Farms. At this hearing, the public was shown the preferred alignment recommended in the FEIS. This alignment has subsequently been referred to as Alternative A.

As a result of comments received at the November 17, 1994, design hearing, Shelby County officials proposed their own preferred alignment, known as Alternative B. It revised the typical cross-section of Alternative A from three lanes in each direction with a raised median to two lanes in each direction with an 80-ft landscaped median for a total right-of-way width of 150-ft. Likewise, the typical cross-section of the Sycamore View Road extension was changed to two traffic lanes in each direction separated by a 30-ft raised median within a right-of-way of 100 ft. Alternative B proposed widening the section of Walnut Grove Road between the Wolf River Bridge and the new roadway to five 12-ft lanes in each direction and a 30-ft raised median within a right-of-way of 172 ft. In addition, Alternative B shifted the alignment of the new roadway to the west of the Alternative A alignment to increase the distance of the road from Patriot Lake, the Visitor Center, Plough Park, and Chickasaw Lake.

An open house public information meeting was held at the Shelby Farms Visitor Center on April 13, 2000. The purpose of this meeting was to enable the public to view the current design concept for Kirby Parkway in the Shelby Farms area, to comment on existing conditions in Shelby Farms, and to suggest other alternatives. On the day of this meeting, Jim Rout, the Mayor of Shelby County, unveiled a new alternative, which subsequently became known as Alternative F – the relocation of Walnut Grove Road.

In 2000-01, TDOT and FHWA made an updated assessment of the potential environmental impacts of several proposed alternative Kirby Parkway alignments through Shelby Farms. In addition to Alternative A, the preferred alignment from the

1991 FEIS, and Alternative B, proposed by Shelby County officials, the reassessment also considered three other alternatives. Designated Alternatives C, D, and E, these three alignments were proposed by members of the public in an attempt to lessen the impact of the parkway on recreational facilities and the Lucius Burch Jr. State Natural Area within Shelby Farms. The reassessment did not include a detailed analysis of Mayor Rout's Alternative F. TDOT and FHWA issued a Technical Environmental Memorandum containing the results of the updated environmental assessment on September 28, 2001. Shelby County and the City of Memphis held a public information meeting in the Shelby Farms Agri-center Auditorium four days earlier to present the findings.

On August 1, 2001, the Mayors of Memphis and Shelby County jointly asked TDOT to begin an environmental assessment of Alternative F. They requested that "the Walnut Grove Relocation Project replace all alternatives considered in the evaluation process relating to the road alignment in the Shelby Farms area, including the alignments referred to as 'Alternatives A through E'." TDOT held an open house public information meeting on March 26, 2002, to show Alternative F to the public. Representatives from TDOT, Shelby County, the City of Memphis, and consulting firm Parsons Brinckerhoff were present to answer questions and explain the project. An Advance Planning Report for Alternative F – the Walnut Grove Road Relocation Project – was approved on September 24, 2002.

Project Status

At the time TDOT put the Walnut Grove Road relocation project on hold for review, the City of Memphis and Shelby County were still considering various options regarding this project. On July 10, 2003, two days before the Public Listening Session on this project, it was reported in the local newspaper that Alternative F was being shelved in favor of Alternative B. In addition, the Major Road Element of the current Memphis MPO Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) does not include the relocation of Walnut Grove Road around Shelby Farms. Instead, the LRTP reflects the following assumptions about a redesigned road network in the Shelby Farms area:

- Walnut Grove Road from I-240 to east of the Wolf River Bridge – eight lanes of traffic and an urban interchange at Humphreys Boulevard.
- Walnut Grove Road through Shelby Farms – six lanes of traffic and an urban interchange at Kirby-Whitten intersection.
- Kirby-Whitten Road running north-south through Shelby Farms with at least four lanes of traffic and an intersection with Sycamore View Road located approximately halfway between Mullins Station Road and Walnut Grove Road.
- Widening of Trinity Road-Mullins Station Road to six lanes.
- Extension of Appling Road from Cordova Road to Mullins Station Road.

5. Process-Related Issues and Concerns

Project Justification

The Walnut Grove Relocation project is part of the Kirby Parkway corridor in eastern Shelby County. Since 1969, a Kirby Parkway project has been included in Memphis regional transportation plans and is part of the MPO planning process. A clear statement of project need was developed in the Advanced Planning Report prepared for Alternative F. The major objectives are to improve mobility and reduce congestion on roads traversing Shelby Farms and parallel roadways. Traffic projections from a system-wide traffic demand forecasting model clearly identifies the justification of the project from a level of service analysis. Design year (2026) ADT's are the range of 50,000 to 96,000 vehicles per day.

A series of six alternatives have been advanced over the years to address congestion concerns. The major debate has focused on the impact of these high capacity roadways on the unique character of Shelby Farms.

Relationship to Local/Regional Planning Efforts

The project is being advanced as part of the local MPO planning process. The City of Memphis has identified the project as important and is supporting the use of local STP funds to construct the project. The Advanced Planning Report (APR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Alternative A were approved in 1991. This project has ranked high on the priority of local projects and is currently listed in the Shelby County MPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

A new Alternative F was introduced on 4/00 followed by a request for TDOT to conduct an Environmental Assessment and 4F statement. An advanced planning report was approved 9/02. On 6/03 the priority shifted to Alternative B being proposed as the desired build alternative as design modification to the previously approved Alternative A. The Shelby Farms project is being segmented with critical segments of Walnut Grove Roadway (over the Wolf River and east of Farm Road) and Sycamore View Road extension being widened with local funds. Other segments of the Alternative B road plan would be constructed with local STP funds. This is a local high priority project and TDOT is only providing supporting services.

No formal plan defining a land use development concept for Shelby Farms has been adopted.

Environmental, Social and Economic Impacts

The critical element hindering the acceptance of the roadway projects is the impact of widening and/or relocating Walnut Grove Road on Shelby Farms. Various alternatives have been defined to mitigate the impact on the farm. Of critical concern: What specifically is the farm? The 4,500-acre area consists of distinct uses such as government uses, an Agri-Center International and specific recreational activities including:

- Lucius Burch Jr. State Natural Area – Section 4(f) resource
- Visitors Center
- Patriot Lake and Patriot Park
- Bison and Longhorn Range
- Arboretum – Section 4(f) resource
- Plough Park – Section 4(f) resource
- Model Rocket Flight Area
- Senior Citizens Gardening Area
- Boy Scout Camping Area
- Soccer Fields
- Hiking Trails

With Walnut Grove and Farm Road currently transecting the farm, some groups want these roads closed and all through traffic removed from the farm. Other groups object to the design selected; a multi-lane divided roadway with full access control and a design speed of 60 mph. Suggestions have been made for:

- At-grade parkway instead of a high-speed freeway design.
- Consider “design speeds more typical of an urban parkway, and therefore more compatible with the Farms.”
- A design that is less visually intrusive without major interchange structures.
- Opportunities to make the new road an “asset to the farm.”

After extensive environmental reviews of each alternative as part of the planning process it was suggested:

- Section 4f of USDOT Act of 1966 may not be an issue.
- No significant recreational resources are within the footprint of Alternative A and B. Some casual uses will need to be moved.

Questions that need to be resolved:

- Is the 1991 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Alternative A still valid because of changes in Shelby Farms.
- Is Alternative B a “design modification” to Alternative A with an approved Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?
- What are acceptable visual impacts for a major interchange?
- What are the impacts of having the proposed interchange constructed near an inactive landfill?
- How can a roadway design be developed to address capacity needs and still become an asset to this unique urban landscape?
- What are the potential effects of traffic congestion at the end of the project?

Public Input

Public hearings and information meetings were conducted by TDOT on 12/88, 11/94, 4/00, 9/01 and 3/02. As a result from the comments received and subsequent discussions proposed modification to the alignment have been made. Discussions have focused on the impact of the roadways and the future of Shelby Farms. Citizens at the public listening session requested a more proactive input and application of a context sensitive design approach. The following comments were raised at the public listening session held 6/03:

“There was no citizen input and no smart growth considerations.”

“TDOT’s public meeting process is a sham designed to meet a minimum standard. They rely on small newspaper ads to inform people. There is no opportunity for public discussion. They use inadequate maps and charts. Their response to large numbers of letters opposing the road was perfunctory. The initial design of the road was communicated in the newspaper. There was no input from the public.”

“Numerous petitions have fallen on deaf ears.”

“At public meeting we are told what is going to happen rather than being able to participate.”

“Citizens need to be part of the planning process. There needs to be real dialogue. People who live in a community know what’s best for the community.”

“Citizens need to have a better understanding of how TDOT makes decisions.”

“Processes are initiated by people. Who are they? They don’t seem to have a disposition for listening to people. Look at the pattern for the last thirty years. TDOT could help communities with long range planning. They could take the lead in helping assess community impact.”

“We need a requirement for public input into road projects. The maps TDOT uses don’t go far enough out.”

“People have the impression it won’t do any good to speak at TDOT meetings. The problem is that local politicians tell TDOT what to do. Changing the process won’t help. People should talk to their local politicians. TDOT is not always the bad guy.”

6. Assessment Results and Findings

Table 1 presents a summary of the project assessment results and conclusions as determined by the evaluation team. As noted in the Study Methodology Overview (see Section 2 of this report), the team chose to present its conclusions by indicating whether the project planning and decision-making processes were **satisfactory (S)** or **unsatisfactory (U)** with regard to 7 issue areas. These issue areas are identified again below and described in more detail:

1. Project need adequately established? – The team considered what the reasons were for starting the project and assessed whether or not these reasons were adequately supported and are still valid.
2. Planning process appropriate for need? – The team assessed the overall planning process for the project to determine if it was appropriate in scale and scope, and also complete, given the nature of the project and project need.
3. Alternatives appropriate? – The team considered whether adequate identification and assessments of alternatives and options were performed during the planning and decision-making processes.
4. Design process appropriate for need? – The team assessed the overall design process for the project to determine if it was appropriate in scale and scope and complete given the nature of the project and project need.
5. Local planning involvement? – The team determined and assessed the project's relationship and compatibility to the local and/or regional comprehensive planning efforts, MPO activities and other local transportation planning.
6. Public involvement appropriate for decision-making? – The team considered the extent of public involvement in project planning and development, and assessed whether this involvement was appropriate and timely relative to decision-making.
7. Adequate environmental, economic and social assessment? – The team assessed whether required or warranted assessments of environmental, economic and social impacts of the project were performed, and whether these assessments were adequate for the particular project circumstances.

A satisfactory (S) assessment in an issue area indicates that the evaluation team reached a consensus conclusion that the actions taken to date by TDOT have been at least adequate and no corrective actions are suggested. On the other hand, an unsatisfactory (U) assessment in an area indicates that the evaluation team reached a consensus conclusion that the actions taken to date by TDOT have not been totally adequate and some corrective actions are suggested. For some issue areas, the evaluation team concluded that, given the current status of the project, the issue area is simply not

applicable for a meaningful assessment and/or any actions which have been taken to date are incomplete but not yet deficient as to warrant an unsatisfactory assessment. In these cases, an N.A./I assessment is reported in Table 1. (Note: the N.A./I assessment was not used on all projects.)

Table 1. Summary of Project Assessment Results

Issue Area	Assessment	Comments
Project need adequately established?	S	The project is part of the Memphis MPO planning process. A clear need has been established for improved north-south and east-west corridors in this part of Shelby County.
Planning process appropriate for need?	S	The project has been systematically planned and reviewed through the MPO process as part of the local transportation system. Comprehensive technical analyses have been completed.
Alternatives appropriate?	S	Six alternatives have been considered, some as the result of the public involvement process. However, there is not yet a settled alternative. The preferred alternative recently shifted from Alternative F to Alternative B, which is being presented as a design modification of Alternative A, which had an approved Advanced Planning Report and Final Environmental Impact Statement in 1991.
Design process appropriate for need?	U	Context-sensitive alternative designs have not been adequately considered. A six-lane limited-access facility with a major overpass interchange is inconsistent with the unique nature of Shelby Farms.
Local planning involvement?	S	TDOT did not initiate this project; instead, the Walnut Grove/Shelby Farms project originated in the local planning process. This is labeled a high-priority project in the Memphis-Shelby County area. The project currently is in the TIP, and the City of Memphis is planning to build sections of the project using local funds. The widening of Walnut Grove east of its intersection with Farm Road in Shelby Farms would be done with City of Memphis funds. The access to Walnut Grove over the Wolf River also would be funded by the City of Memphis. The project under review would address the remaining section of Walnut Grove in Shelby Farms.

Table 1. Summary of Project Assessment Results (cont.)

Issue Area	Assessment	Comments
Public involvement appropriate for decision-making?	S	Much effort has been taken to involve Friends of Shelby Farms and some other selected interest groups. However, other groups still feel that they have not been heard in the planning and design process. In addition, general opportunities for public input have been inadequate, as have informational materials such as maps. Opportunities exist for greater public and interest group input into the design process using context-sensitive design techniques.
Adequate environmental, economic, and social assessment?	NA (I)	The process of selecting a “build” alternative is still ongoing.

7. Recommendations

The Walnut Grove Relocation project in the Memphis area is a local project. It is the opinion of the evaluation team that TDOT should take no further action regarding the project until certain actions are accomplished and issues resolved at the local level. That is, until a build-alternative is selected locally, and it is clarified that Alternative B is truly a “design modification” of the previously approved Alternative A.

The City of Memphis and Shelby County, in consultation with interest groups and the general public, should re-affirm their support and interest in pursuing the project to completion. Assuming there is continued local government support, the appropriate local entities should work to select a preferred alternative and perform the necessary environmental, economic, and social impact studies. Regarding this effort, it is the opinion of the evaluation team that this project is a good candidate to apply context-sensitive design principles in planning/designing the project in order to reflect the unique characteristics of Shelby Farms as well as the surrounding residential and natural areas.

Assuming that a build-alternative is selected and pursued, it should first be clarified a build-alternative is selected and it is clarified if the Alternative B is truly a “design modification” of the previously-approved Alternative A.